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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 001415

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [IN](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: CONGRESSMAN CROWLEY AND RAHUL GANDHI DISCUSS
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Classified By: DCM Bob Blake Jr., for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a half hour February 20 meeting with Congressman Joseph Crowley (D-NY), Congress heir apparent Rahul Gandhi was eager to learn the Democratic party positions on a number of foreign policy issues, including the war in Iraq, the situation in the Middle East and the US relationship with Pakistan. Preferring to listen rather than state policy positions, Gandhi indicated that he had been doing extensive reading and appeared interested in grasping the intricacies of foreign policy issues. His emphasis on Democratic Party positions and meeting Congressman Crowley suggests he would like to cultivate closer relations with the US, to include the Democratic Party. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) arranged the meeting, which its representative stated was a deliberate effort by Gandhi and his handlers to raise Rahul's public profile and an indication that he would play a wider public role in the future, including meeting with USG and Mission officials. While not totally comfortable in the forefront, Gandhi was competent and articulate. End Summary.

An Important Trip

¶2. (C) In a February 20 surprise meeting with Rahul Gandhi organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Congressman Joseph Crowley (D-NY) discussed a broad range of issues, including the US/India relationship, the Middle East and Iraq. Congressman Crowley informed Gandhi that as a co-chair of the India Caucus and representative of the second largest Indian-American community in the US, he travels to India often. He explained that he was in the country to discuss the issues with Indian opinion leaders as a precursor to the upcoming POTUS visit. Gandhi, who was in a receptive mood, offered to show the Congressman his constituency in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh during his next visit.

To Deal with Bangladesh Issues

13. (C) Congressman Crowley informed Gandhi that he was also traveling to Bangladesh at the request of the State Department to deliver the message of increasing USG concern regarding the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh and the possibility of terrorist groups using the country as a launching pad to attack other countries, and that he hoped to gain some insight into the Indian perspective on this problem.

And the Civil Nuclear Agreement

14. (C) The Congressman then briefed Gandhi on the July 18 Civil Nuclear Agreement, stating that in some ways it remained a hard sell for Democrats, as many remain wedded to the NPT. In his view, this was not completely "rational," as it was simply not possible for India to belong. Congressman Crowley criticized the recent New York Times Editorial on the subject as "not realistic," as it "does not take India's neighborhood into account," stating that "you cannot go backwards." Instead, the USG should try to "include a non-proliferating country like India," as this is mutually beneficial to both countries. Congressman Crowley pointed out to Gandhi that this issue is likely to become increasingly politicized in coming months, as the November mid-term elections come closer, and partisanship causes many Democrats to oppose all Republican initiatives. Crowley

NEW DELHI 00001415 002 OF 003

emphasized that he agrees with the President on this issue and that it is important to have a credible plan in order to build bi-partisan support. Gandhi listened intently, but made no response.

Curious About Iraq

15. (C) Gandhi appeared interested in learning from Crowley the Democratic Party's stance on other foreign policy issues and asked him specifically about Iraq. The Congressman pointed out that the issue is very complex and Democrats are split, although almost everyone agrees that it is not possible simply to "walk away." Some Democrats are proposing a "measured withdrawal," he explained, in which US military units are replaced by Iraqi ones one by one. Crowley lamented that divisions among the Democrats on this issue have not presented a clear message that the party is capable of leading on security issues.

16. (C) In his response, Gandhi pointed out that he had been doing a lot of reading on this subject and had read reports from an American think-tank that the most likely outcome of US involvement will be the establishment of a pro-Iran, Shia-dominated democracy, which is "obviously not acceptable to the Americans." Gandhi noted that by insisting on becoming involved in Iraq, the US had taken on a complex Iraqi problem of deep ethnic and religious divisions and simply "turned it into an American problem." He opined that their ethnic problem is probably insurmountable and as a result the Americans will be blamed for the failings of Iraq and its society. Asking Congressman Crowley if an American pullout was "feasible," Gandhi opined that even if the US "declares victory and goes home," it will be similar to what happened in Lebanon. The Israelis tried the same tactic and Hezbollah declared to the world that it had driven Israel out. Gandhi predicted that US opponents in Iraq would likely do the same thing.

And About Israel/Palestine

17. (C) Gandhi then asked the Congressman what the Democratic

party position was on the recent Hamas victory. He responded that many observers have determined that Hamas did not win because of its ideology, but rather for its promise to deliver much-needed services and honest government to the frustrated Palestinian people. Crowley pointed out that there is a similar phenomenon in Bangladesh, where the GOB's all-pervasive corruption has led to faulty delivery of services, while the Ministries run by the Jamaat-Islami have acquired a reputation for honesty and efficiency. Congressman Crowley emphasized that the situation is troubling and should it break down, there could be a growing threat of civil war.

18. (C) Gandhi responded that the GOI has faced a similar problem in Assam, where it for years battled a separatist insurgency. The Indian strategy, he pointed out, was to allow the insurgent group to form the Assam government. This "defanged and discredited" the insurgency, as the insurgents proved unable to govern and lost popular support. He envisaged that a similar outcome was possible in the Occupied Territories. Gandhi noted that he had attended a lunch with former President Clinton the day before and had heard similar views from him, as Clinton stated that the Hamas victory could be an "opportunity for progress" in the Middle East over the long term.

NEW DELHI 00001415 003 OF 003

Concerns About the Neighborhood

19. (C) The Congressman emphasized to Gandhi that it would be in India's interest to draw closer to Israel as India, Israel and the US share common concerns. He noted that India, like Israel, is a fully functional democracy in a region characterized by non-democratic states and hostile neighbors.

Congressman Crowley noted that he has told the GOB that its recognition of Israel could be very beneficial. Gandhi replied that these were interesting ideas, but "volatile issues" for the GOI and asked Crowley how the Democrats viewed the India/Pakistan relationship. The Congressman responded that the recent earthquake presented an opportunity for the US to establish better rapport with Islamabad, but the best incentive would be solid signs that the Pakistan military was moving out of politics, and the USG would continue to press for greater democracy.

The Concluding Anecdote

110. (C) Gandhi concluded the meeting with an anecdote about his constituency. The President of Guyana originally comes from the Amethi area and Gandhi accompanied him on a visit to his home village. The villagers were a little unsure of what and where Guyana was, but had been told that the President would make a significant cash contribution at the conclusion of the visit. The locals were upset when the President left without making such a donation and to appease them, Gandhi explained, "I built them a road."

Comment - Rahul's Coming Out

111. (C) The CII representative (Senior Consultant - Vikram Badshah) who arranged the meeting claimed close and long-term contact with the Gandhi family. He explained that Gandhi's followers have convinced him that he could no longer afford to remain in the background and must become more publicly involved. Badshah also indicated that Gandhi was now prepared to end his long term avoidance of public contact with American officials and hinted that further interaction would be forthcoming. Badshah told Representative Crowley that most within Congress had preferred Priyanka Gandhi as the heir apparent, but her refusal forced the party to turn to Rahul. However, there was growing speculation that Priyanka would eventually "rule from behind," and that if and

when Rahul becomes PM, Priyanka Gandhi would be the Congress Party Chief and Rahul's role would be largely that of a figurehead. Rahul appeared tentative and reluctant to state policy preferences, and was more in a listening mode. When he did speak, however, he was articulate, reasonable and charming. His emphasis on US partisan politics and the Democratic party reflected his comfort level with American politics and culture, bred from his years in Boston. It also appeared that as part of his education for greater power, he has been reading extensively about various policy issues. He seemed more interested in these big picture issues than local politics.

12, (U) This cable has been cleared by Congressman Crowley.

¶13. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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